

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Middleton Building Supply

New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Building Supply Company Adds Lean Tools to their Belt

Client Profile:

LaValley-Middleton Building Supply, Inc. (LMBS) was founded nearly 45 years ago as LaValley Building Supply. It is the largest independently owned building materials supplier in Vermont and New Hampshire. Today, in Union (Middleton), New Hampshire they manufacture roof trusses, wall panels, door units, kitchen countertops and handle custom planing. This location also houses dry kilns, planing and molding operations for the company. The facility employs 100 people.

Situation:

LaValley-Middleton owner and President, Larry Huot, and other staff learned of the New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NH MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, at a Northeast Lumberman's Manufacturing Association Conference. The group liked NH MEP's enthusiasm and approach to the concept of Lean manufacturing. Marcie Perry, LaValley's CFO/General Manager, was familiar with the Lean concepts from her work in the automotive industry. She knew the methodology would apply well to their manufacturing operation. Perry contacted NH MEP to implement Lean manufacturing concepts at the Middleton location.

Solution:

The process began with a Lean Overview class and simulation (Time Wise LE 102) to bring 20 employees up to speed on the concepts of Lean. This training combines classroom work with a manufacturing simulation and allows the students to use what they have learned and see the effects on the manufacturing process. Next, employee teams worked on Value Stream Mapping (VSM), which tracks processes thru the company to find the obstacles that are preventing them from reaching their desired future state. During this mapping process they identified improvement opportunities in all areas of their business including: the sawmill, planing, molding, the kilns and warehouse as well as in the retail operation. Then, Kaizen events were held to address the obstacles they discovered and make the necessary improvements. Teams also devoted time to sorting, cleaning, and reorganizing using 5S (shine, sort, standardize, set in order and sustain) throughout the facilities.

The planing mill was where Middleton chose to begin their first Value Stream Mapping and Kaizen sessions. Middleton had been experiencing a significant amount of downtime in this particular mill and over the years had accepted this as a matter of course in the department. However, with the downtime reaching as high as 600 minutes per week, this was becoming very costly. By looking at the process, they found that about half of a 20-minute set-up was attributed to the work it took to "clear the deck" after an order of boards was planed. Once an order was cut, the planed boards remained on the conveyor of the machine to be banded, tagged and sorted onto carts to move to other locations for grading and inspection before set up for the next run could be done. "Clearing the deck" was in fact, taking as much time as doing the next set up. Synchronizing the way the boards were being handled and distributed, much like the pit crew for a race car, resulted in a more orderly and coordinated process that reduced downtime on the planing mill.

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LMBS took advantage of a Workforce Opportunity Council grant which assisted with some of the training costs. Linda Ellis, NH MEP project manager, told them about the grant and helped with the application process. Members of LMBS were also able to attend The Governor's Manufacturing Leadership Series, which NH MEP was involved with, and received valuable information about competing with the overseas market at these events.

Results:

- * Reduced downtime by more than 50 percent, from 600 minutes to less than 300 minutes per week.
- * Increased production time by 5 hours, or 40,000 more board feet of lumber per week.
- * Improved work environment and employee safety.
- * Increased job satisfaction

Testimonial:

"Linda Ellis and her team from New Hampshire MEP were not only knowledgeable about the Lean Manufacturing process but were able to relate the theory and practice on a level that all employees could see the benefit of planning a project and setting about putting their plans to work for them. It was an enjoyable experience well worth the cost of the program, which resulted in tangible results. Still, after two years we use the Lean Manufacturing process to attack any problems we encounter whether it is during a simple meeting or a longer project like the installation of the new boiler or new kilns."

Marcie Perry, CFO and General Manager